

# INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS AND ROAD RISK

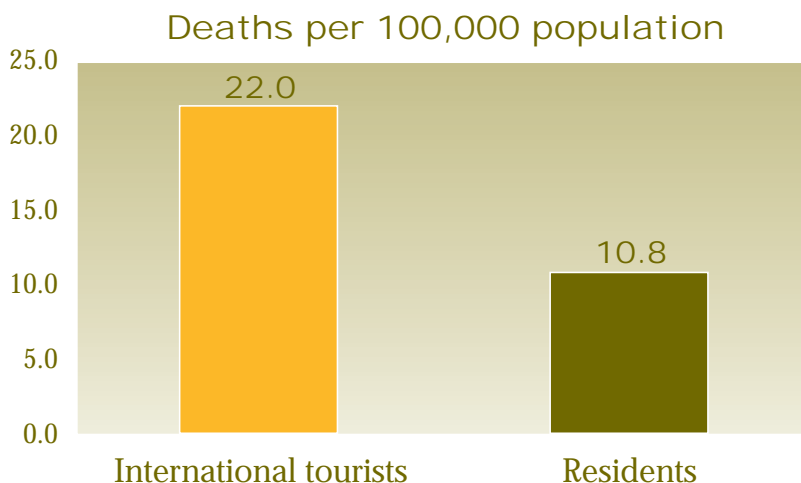
*This Monograph is an overview of international tourist involvement in fatal crashes in Australia. It includes an assessment of the relative risk of involvement of international tourists, the size of the problem in road safety terms and the projected issue in the year 2000, the factors associated with tourist involvement in road trauma and possible countermeasures.*

## The size of the problem

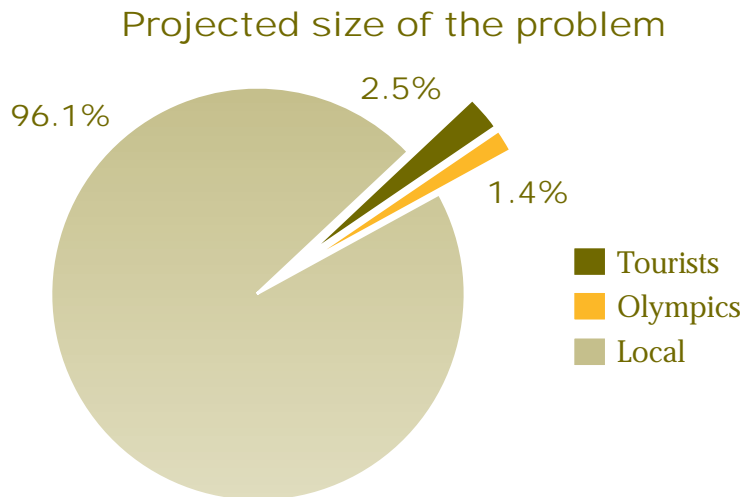
Figures from the Bureau of Tourism Research and the Federal Office of Road Safety can be used to generate the number of road deaths per 100,000 of population. For all road users, the rate of death of international tourists in 1994 was twice that of resident Australians. As illustrated in Chart 1, there were 22.0 international tourist road deaths per 100,000 population compared with 10.8 Australians.

It is probable tourists are at even greater risk of death on the road when compared with Australians. Bureau of Tourism Research figures show that the tourist group is drawn from a relatively low risk middle age population. There are proportionately less of the high risk age groups than in the resident population.

**Chart 1. International and resident road deaths per 100,000 population (1994)**



**Chart 2. The 2000 Olympics and projected road deaths**



Although international tourists are at greater risk of death on Australian roads, the absolute size of the problem has been relatively minor. In 1994, there were 45 fatalities identified as international tourists. However, this is set to change. Forty-five road deaths each year is a result of approximately 3 million visitors staying an average of 24 days each.

In 2000, with the Sydney Olympics, it is estimated that 4.6 million tourists will visit Australia. Assuming that they remain a similar period to past tourists, the number of deaths involving international tourists on Australian roads

is set to increase to approximately 70 during that year. A further 1,000 serious injuries to overseas visitors could also be expected. Chart 2 illustrates the projected percentage distribution of road deaths across international tourists visiting the Olympics, other international tourists and resident Australians.

## Profile of tourist road deaths

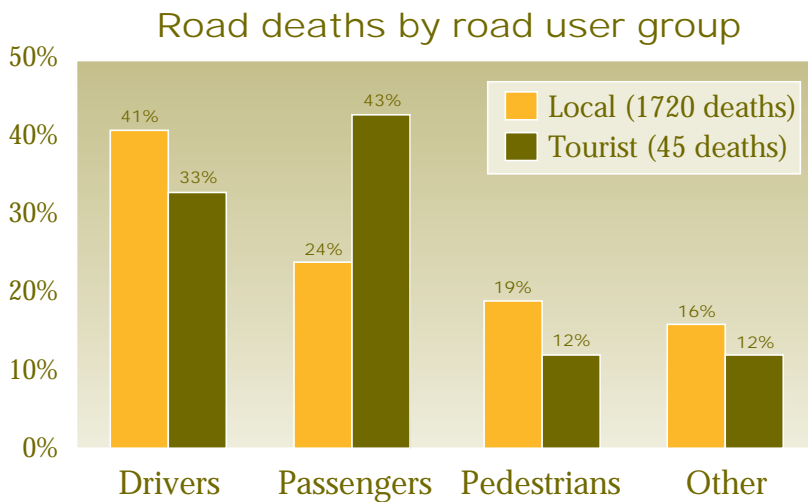
Data from FORS' Fatality Crash Database (1988–1996) were used to generate information on the characteristics of international tourists killed in road crashes. Their profile is somewhat different from that of the total population. Tourists are more likely to be occupants of vehicles. Vehicle occupants comprise 3 in 4 of international tourists killed compared with 2 in 3 Australians. International tourists also tend to be passengers rather than drivers in contrast to Australian occupants who tend to be drivers. Chart 3 has more details.

## Major factors

### Drivers

In general, international drivers do not exhibit the same high risk behaviours that local drivers display. Factors such as

**Chart 3. International tourist and resident road deaths by road user group**



alcohol and speeding are lower for international drivers although they are still of significance. The fact that international drivers do not exhibit the same pattern of high risk behaviours associated with local drivers is suggestive that the causes of crashes may be due to their unfamiliarity with Australian conditions. However, such a proposition is very difficult to prove with existing data sources. It must remain an educated guess at the causes of crashes involving international drivers.

The most prominent risk factor that differentiates between international and local drivers is seat belt usage. Fifty-two percent of international drivers killed were not restrained at the time of the crash. This compares with 38% for local drivers. In addition, unbelted international drivers differ from unbelted local drivers.

For local drivers, not wearing a seat belt is associated with other high risk behaviours. This is not true of international drivers. Nearly 60% of unbelted local drivers were drunk compared with less than 10% of international drivers. It could well be the case that failure to wear a seat belt by an international tourist tends to reflect the usage in their own country rather than a tendency to high risk behaviour. As such, it is potentially more amenable to active intervention.

### *Passengers*

Historically, vehicle passengers killed comprise the largest single road user group accounting for 46% of international tourist deaths on the road. In approximately 50% of these cases, the driver of the vehicle was also an international tourist.

As with drivers, seat belt usage is a prominent factor. International tourists are less likely than local passengers to be wearing a seat belt. The difference between local and tourist passengers is almost exactly the difference between local and tourist drivers with 55% of tourist passengers killed unbelted compared with 38% of local passengers. Once again, this behaviour probably reflects practice in their own country rather than a tendency to high risk behaviours.

### *Pedestrians*

The number of international tourists killed as pedestrians each year is less than ten. Nevertheless, increased pedestrian activity can be expected in Sydney during the Olympic Games and the potential for increased levels of road trauma exists.

Three in four pedestrian deaths involving international tourists occur on the near side of the road, ie when the pedestrian steps from kerb. This proportion is greater than that for resident pedestrians where slightly less than half are hit on the

near side. In the case of resident pedestrians, many of these are intoxicated.

The high proportion of international tourists who are sober and killed when stepping from the kerb is consistent with the proposition that these may involve a failure to look in the appropriate direction when walking across the road.

## Potential countermeasures

Reducing the risks faced by international tourists on Australian roads is not an easy one. The average tourist remains for 24 days in the country and is highly mobile.

- The most obvious countermeasure to reduce tourist casualties would be a program to increase use of seat belts. It is here where the gains are potentially largest.
- There may also be some benefit in educating tourists as to the strict enforcement of speed and alcohol limits in Australia. These remain significant factors in crashes involving international drivers although the relative size of the problem is less than that for local drivers.
- Finally, international tourists obviously have some difficulty adapting to conditions as pedestrians on Australian roads. Again education and perhaps signage at frequently travelled locations may assist in reducing the toll.

